



Community Float Building Manual

OVERVIEW	2
IMPORTANT LINKS	2
TAKE HOME AN AWARD	2
THE 7 BASIC STEPS	2
FLOAT BUILDING GUIDE	3
DETERMINE YOUR BUDGET	3
SECURE A TOW VEHICLE & TRAILER	3
Tow Vehicle	3
Choose Your Trailer	3
CREATE A DESIGN / DEVELOP A BUILD PLAN	4
Design Your Float	4
Design Tips	4
IDENTIFY BUILD MATERIALS & TOOLS NEEDED	5
Commonly Used / Approved Materials	5
Materials to use with caution	5
SELECT A BUILD LOCATION	5
ORDER DECORATION MATERIALS & SIGNAGE	6
BUILD YOUR FLOAT!	6
HELPFUL RESOURCES	6
Tutorials	6
Design Ideas	6
Float Supplies	6

OVERVIEW

CONGRATULATIONS! You have taken the first step towards making a Community Float for the Junior Orange Bowl Parade. This year's theme is "Miracle on the Mile: A Holiday Parade and Celebration". If you downloaded this file, you have probably never built a float before, so we have compiled this document to help get you started and reduce your anxiety to a manageable level.

What is a Community Float? Community Floats are floats designed and created by community organizations that are participating in the parade. Unlike our major sponsor floats which are much larger (8'w x 35' long!) Community Floats are half-size "mini-floats" that are typically 6-8' wide by 12-15' long, and easily towed behind a personal vehicle. They are an affordable option for smaller organizations who want to have a strong visual presence at the parade, either as a stand-alone unit or to enhance an existing unit such as a walking or performing group.

IMPORTANT LINKS

[PARADE GUIDELINES](#) (PDF)

[PARADE UNIT APPLICATION](#)

[PARADE WAIVER](#)

TAKE HOME AN AWARD

The judges will award points for each entry based on creativity, costumes, and entertainment value. As you're designing, think about which award you'd like to put on your mantle and push your design to its creative limits! All community float units marching in the parade will be judged in five categories, with the winner each category receiving **\$500 per award**:

Community Float Awards:

- Best Costumes
- Best Use of Holiday Theme
- Best Live Musical Performance
- Best Community Spirit
- Best Overall

Judging and Selection of Winners will take place immediately prior to the start of the parade, from 4:00 - 4:30 pm in the staging area. Winning floats will then proceed down Miracle Mile with a banner in front of the unit announcing their award.

FLOAT BUILDING GUIDE

On the following pages, we have broken down each of the 7 float-building essentials to provide a step-by-step guide to help you along the way. There is also a [Helpful Resources](#) section at the end with links to assist you in finding vendors, watching YouTube tutorials and ordering specialty materials.

THE 7 BASIC STEPS

Float building is much easier than it sounds and yes, **YOU CAN DO IT!** So, let's get started and have some fun! There are 7 basic steps to creating your Community Float:

1. [Determine your Budget](#)
2. [Secure a Tow Vehicle & Trailer](#)
3. [Create Your Design & Develop a Build Plan](#)
4. [Identify Build Materials & Tools Needed](#)
5. [Select a Build Location](#)
6. [Order Decoration Materials & Signage](#)
7. [Build Your Float!](#)

1) DETERMINE YOUR BUDGET

The cost of building a custom float will vary depending on how big your float is, how many moving parts, specialty materials and other elements like sound systems or special effects are included. Most community floats can be created for \$1500 or less; it is even possible to create a float for only a few hundred dollars if you get donated materials or have items already on hand. Are you on a really limited budget? That's okay! Sometimes free and/or upcycled materials can make the best float base. Get creative with cardboard, paint, glitter, tissue paper and dollar store items. Go on a treasure hunt in your garage for hula hoops, pool noodles, holiday lights and other items that you can repurpose. Bear in mind that the bigger your float, the more surface area you need to cover, so if your budget is small, try to design around the colors and materials that you already have on hand. [Materials Estimator](#)

2) SECURE A TOW VEHICLE & TRAILER

Tow Vehicle

The first step is to find a friend with a pickup truck or van with a hitch to pull your float. Make sure the trailer hitch matches the hitch ball size on your trailer. Confirm and test electrical hook up to the trailer lights. Check to make sure the tow load does not exceed the vehicle tow capacity. If you plan to connect lights, a sound system, inflatable decorations or anything else that uses a lot of power, you will also need either a small, portable generator or a [power inverter](#) connected to your vehicle (be sure to select the appropriate inverter for your vehicle and power needs).

Choose Your Trailer

Next, determine the trailer you will use; either one you own, borrow from a friend, or rent from a local provider like U-Haul. The easiest option is using a trailer you already have access to. Suggested minimum size: 6' wide x 8' long (1-2 riders), but if you have a larger trailer that is better. There are a wide variety of trailer styles available; they can have metal or wood platform bases, removable or fixed side rails, ramps/no ramps and more. Boat and ATV trailers can also be used by adding $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood on top to create a base. Whatever trailer you decide to use, be sure to keep in mind SAFETY FIRST. Important notes:

- If you will have riders, be sure a secure, fixed handhold is available for each person.
- How will riders get on/off the float? Make sure you have safe access!

- If building a wood base, make sure all areas are supported and can hold the weight of what you are attaching and/or people who will be standing or sitting on it.
- Use your own best judgement based on the total number and age of your riders.

If you don't own a trailer or know someone with one you can borrow, you can rent one from a local provider. For example, U-Haul has a 6' x 12' Utility Trailer that rents for around \$35/day. Smaller trailers can be used, but 6x12 is the best for parade size. U-Haul utility trailers come either with a ramp which can be covered and turned into a back "wall" of the float, or without a ramp which is easier to get riders on/off. If renting, be sure to reserve your trailer well in advance, as December is a busy month. We recommend you pick up at least 1 day prior to the parade (Saturday) and decorate on Saturday and add any final details on Sunday. Return either Sunday night or Monday morning. Budget around \$100-120 for rental costs including insurance.

NOTE: If you plan to have riders on a U-Haul trailer:

- Perimeter railings are low; do not let small children ride without adult supervision.
- Have riders sit on a bench, on the trailer deck, or stand in the *middle* of the trailer for safety
- U-Haul trailer decks are corrugated sheet metal (like hurricane shutter panels) so you may want to add a plywood base (cut sheets to fit) to make it more stable.

3) CREATE A DESIGN / DEVELOP A BUILD PLAN

Design Your Float

Now that you have the logistics under control, you can design your float. *Why is this not the first step?* Because building a community float on a moderate budget means your design will likely be determined or at least influenced by the trailer and materials you are able to get donated.

Get the team together to come up with your concept. The parade theme is "Miracle on the Mile", emphasizing all of the miracles that happen during the holidays. Your interpretation of this theme, combined with your organization's branding, strategic goals and community message will help drive your overall design. Tap into the creative people on your team for ideas! Sketch out a few of the better concepts to visualize your design and vote on the best one - or make it a competition to get your team really excited!



Design Tips

- Choose at least 3 colors:
 - Base (*main color=white*) - the main deck of the trailer and largest area of the float.

- **Fringe** (*gold*) - the part that hangs over the edge of the float and hides the wheels
- **Twist** (*green*) - the garland-type edging that provides visual separation between the base and the fringe.
- **Delight the senses:** Add lights, music, color, texture, moving parts, special effects, etc. to make your float as exciting and memorable as possible!
- **Include at least one LARGE feature element** to capture visual attention. It is better to have 1-3 large pieces that make a bold statement than to have a lot of little decorations that will get "lost" visually.
- Viewers have a 360° view as your float passes by, so **cover all visible surfaces**.
- **Keep it Simple.** The best designs are visually clean and have a straightforward, simple message. Signage should be easy to read, riders should be clearly visible and your theme should be obvious within seconds to judges.

4) IDENTIFY BUILD MATERIALS & TOOLS NEEDED

The good news is that you don't need any special tools to build a float! You will, however, need materials for your float, so here is a handy [Materials Estimator](#) to help you determine what you will need to order. Don't forget to look around to see what you already have or ask for material donations. Some common tools you may need are hammers, screwdrivers, drills and staple guns, but depending on your design you may also need a saw or other more advanced tools.

Commonly Used / Approved Materials:

- Plywood - Great for creating the base/deck for your float! *Use a lighter wood for sides/decorative elements, like lauan ("door skin") or other similar thin materials.*
- Cardboard - Create large shapes easily using recycled cardboard boxes and duct tape. Be sure to cover cardboard to protect it from moisture
- Plastic Sheeting - Cover large areas quickly in a solid color. Rolls are available at Party City or can be ordered on Amazon. Clear packing tape can be used to connect plastic pieces to each other.
- Floral Sheeting - Look like a pro! Floral or petal sheeting will give your float a wonderful textured look. Available in many colors, it comes in a sheet 3'W x 15'L for around \$30.
- Zip Ties - Awesome for attaching plastic sheeting to metal trailers and attaching door skin (lauan) or cardboard panels to create large shapes. Also useful for attaching decorative items to railings or securing light strands. Found in any hardware store or Amazon.com.

Materials to use with caution:

- Clear packing tape does not stick when it gets wet, except on plastic - avoid using it to attach items to metal, cardboard or wood surfaces.
- Paper products (cardboard, poster board, tissue paper) - in rainy weather, these materials can sag or even dissolve. If building/storing outside, attach decorative items the day of the parade.
- Anything with sharp edges or that may cause an injury to a rider should be padded (or avoided)

5) SELECT A BUILD LOCATION

You will need a space large enough to accommodate the trailer width and length as well as the final height of the float. Allow at least 4' of space around the perimeter of the trailer frame for people to easily build and decorate it. A residential garage is perfectly fine but a warehouse is fantastic if you have access to one. If you don't have a covered location (i.e. you are building in a backyard or driveway location) be sure to cover the float overnight to protect the float electronics and decor from moisture.

6) ORDER DECORATION MATERIALS & SIGNAGE

At least 2 weeks prior to your scheduled build date, you will want to order all of your float materials and signage. Allow plenty of time for pandemic shipment delays, especially if you are planning to use floral sheeting, twist garland and fringe since they are not as readily available. As soon as you know what decoration materials you need, order them just to be on the safe side.

Order your unit banners directly through our preferred vendor, **FastSigns**:

Contact details and discount code coming soon!

7) BUILD YOUR FLOAT!

Grab some snacks, crank up the tunes and assemble your team for a day of fun!

We suggest a minimum of 4 hours to assemble your float if you have a solid plan and all tools and materials available. You may need more than this, however, if you: have a large float, a small number of volunteers, include music/lights, or forget to bring any materials!

Plan ahead!

- Ask volunteers to bring a bag lunch and drinks for their personal use
- Assign roles to volunteers based on their skill levels (tools, paint, electrical, etc.)
- Structure your day for success! *A sample build day agenda is included below:*

10:00 AM	Volunteers Arrive / Briefing: show design, assign roles
10:30 AM	Break into teams, assemble main base structure
11:00 AM	Add electrical for sound/lighting
11:30 AM	Cover all base elements in floral or plastic sheeting
12:30 PM	<i>Lunch Break</i>
1:00 PM	Add remaining decorative elements & attach signage
1:40 PM	Clean up / return tools
2:00 PM	<i>Thank everyone for coming!</i>

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Tutorials

- [How to Build a Parade Float](#)
- [Top 5 Tips for Building an Award Winning Float](#) (video)
- [Making large scale art cheap: parade float build](#) (video)
- [Charlotte Pride Float Building Handbook](#) (detailed PDF resource)
- [Low-Boy Trailer DIY design instructions](#)
- [Hay Trailer DIY design instructions](#)

Design Ideas

- [Astro Parade: Float Design Ideas](#)
- [Pinterest](#)
- [Parade float flowers DIY](#) (video)
- [Valley Decorating](#)

Float Supplies

- Hardware/Lumber Stores
- Party City
- Michael's / Craft Stores
- Dollar Stores
- [Amazon float decorations](#)
- [Parade Float Supplies Now](#)
- [Parade Float Stuff](#)
- [Stumps Party Supply](#)
- [Oriental Trading](#)
- [Anderson's Float supplies](#)
- [Party Value](#)
- [Fun Carnival](#)
- [eMardi Gras Beads](#)
- [Valley Decorating](#)
- [Mardi Gras Outlet](#)
- [Liberty Flag](#)
- [PromNite.com](#)
- [Bronners Display](#)

NOTES:

7 Basic Steps to Building a Parade Float

ENTER YOUR TIMELINE DATES BELOW

1 Determine your Budget



2 Secure a Tow Vehicle & Trailer



3 Create Your Design & Develop a Build Plan



4 Identify Build Materials & Tools Needed



5 Select a Build Location



6 Order Decoration Materials & Signage



7 Build Your Float



Parade Day!



December 12

Staging 2PM - 4PM
Parade Start 5PM